



Testimony of Kimie Shellman
In Support of HB 5473 AN ACT CONCERNING ACTIONS TO
RECOVER DAMAGES FOR SEXUAL ABUSE, SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION OR SEXUAL ASSAULT OF A MINOR
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing, March 17, 2010

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Kimie Shellman, and I am a state certified Sexual Assault Crisis Counselor/ Advocate for the New Britain Sexual Assault Crisis Service, a program of the YWCA New Britain. I am writing in full support of HB 5473 AN ACT CONCERNING ACTIONS TO RECOVER DAMAGES FOR SEXUAL ABUSE, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OR SEXUAL ASSAULT OF A MINOR. The YWCA New Britain provides services to all towns in Hartford County plus Plymouth and part of Tolland County, including responding directly to 14 hospitals throughout the state.

As a child advocate who has counseled and advocated for many survivors of child sexual assault, I have seen first hand the emotional devastation that survivors experience. The children that I work with all are under age 18 so they are within their statute of limitations, however, there are so many reasons why survivors of childhood sexual assault do not disclose their abuse as soon as it occurs. In cases of sexual assault 86% of victims know their attacker, 100% of the children I have worked with have known their perpetrators. The perpetrator gains the child and the family's trust, and then secretly betrays it, and usually continues to manipulate and coerce the child through power and control tactics, which include threats, fear and bribery. For many children this can be extremely confusing, the perpetrator may be a family member or a close friend, and the child may be confused as to what is abuse, and what is affection—most perpetrators do not harm their victims because they want to be able to continue to abuse them. In this way, the child may not even understand that they are being abused until much later, and then they may feel it is too late to tell anyone, or that the abuse was in some way their fault, or that no one will believe them. Many of the children I have worked with were abused for years as young children, and did not realize that it was abuse until they reached adolescence. It was during this developmental period that they had conversations with friends about what those friends' relationships were like with adults growing up. These children have described to me that they felt so confused by being taken advantage of, that they were unsure whether they should tell anyone because they feared no one would believe them, that they would be blamed, or that they might get in trouble for not telling sooner.

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse often experience depression, anxiety, a deep sense of guilt, shame, confusion, loss of trust in others, relationship issues, self injurious behaviors, suicide and suicidal ideation, substance abuse and much more. All of these emotional reactions can have a debilitating effect on an individual and could be factors in whether the child discloses their assault. A main factor in their decision to disclose is a fear of not being believed, and/or being blamed. This is often something the perpetrator has told them, or they themselves have a deep incapacitating fear of and can greatly impact their decision to disclose.

Sexual assault is a horrific crime, and it is an ordeal that no one should ever have to deal with. Those who have been abused should be given the right to report this crime at their own pace and not feel pressure to disclose within rigid timeframes. I ask that you consider the rights of the individuals who have been victimized and please support the elimination of the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse cases.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you would like to discuss this matter any further I can be reached at (860) 225-4681 x266

Regards,

Kimie Shellman
Child Advocate
YWCA New Britain- Sexual Assault Crisis Services